



**Testimony of Denique Weidema-Lewis
Director of Prevention, Positive Directions**

***H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING
JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

*February 23 2017 Appropriations Subcommittee on Health Public Hearing
Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, Regional Action Council Funding*

Dear: Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Senator Markley, Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations Subcommittee:

My name is Denique Weidema-Lewis and I am the Director of Prevention at Positive Directions located in Westport; as an agency, we provide prevention and counseling services for the communities of Westport, Wilton, Weston, Fairfield, and Norwalk. I am writing today to strongly oppose the cuts to Regional Action Councils that will decimate the current prevention network structure.

I work very closely with the Mid-Fairfield Substance Abuse Coalition, a program of Human Services Council (HSC) located out of Norwalk. RACs are the only CT entity, who are community-driven and work THROUGHOUT the lifespan on a VARIETY of topics related to substance misuse and mental health promotion across ALL sectors of the community. The Regional Action Councils throughout Connecticut act as a life-preserver to the local communities within their communities. They buoy us who do substance misuse prevention to make community- level change based on not only passion, but through the use of relevant quantitative and qualitative data, encouraging data-driven processes. They provide local trainings and professional development on emerging trending topics and shine light on how state initiatives impact the local level. They support local advocacy efforts and encourage legislation to safeguard all members of the community, especially to subpopulations most vulnerable such as youth. They've led the charge on the opioid epidemic and have been on the frontline on working with prescribers and pharmacists to safeguard medication misuse and abuse. They keep us above water through mini-grant programs and Local Prevention Council dollars.

Locally, we have benefited seeing our student drug use rates reduce based on the technical assistance we receive through our RAC. More community stakeholders have become interested in being a part of our initiatives, and the work continues to flourish. Without the help of the RAC, I'm confident that we wouldn't be able to do this work as effectively to address the needs of our local communities.

I strongly urge you to reconsider their consolidation; they are a necessary piece of the CT prevention infrastructure. Thank you for your continued efforts services and programs which support substance misuse prevention and mental health promotion.

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